REMARKS OF
CHAIRWOMAN JESSICA ROSENWORCEL
SILICON VALLEY SPACE WEEK
COMPUTER HISTORY MUSEUM
MOUNTAIN VIEW, CALIFORNIA
OCTOBER 17, 2023

Good morning! It is great to be with you for Silicon Valley Space Week. When I told people I was headed to Northern California, someone asked if I was going to be meeting with a bunch of high-flying technology companies. The answer was yes. Because if you are heading to a gathering focused on satellite innovation, you are talking about high-flying technology and this is a group of literally, the highest.

This is actually my second visit to Northern California to talk about the space sector. Last year, I joined Vice President Harris for a National Space Council event at the Chabot Space and Science Center in Oakland. It was a star-filled gathering in every sense. In addition to the Vice President, Governor Newsom was on hand, and the crowd was filled with commercial actors leading the way in the new space economy.

Something you learn fast if you take over a little regulatory agency in Washington is that it is never a good idea to deliver remarks in a line-up with nationally-known figures. Making your mark on stage when you are sandwiched between a Governor and the Vice President is not easy. It is doubly hard when you are someone who spends days in the minutiae of spectrum policy, assessing claims of harmful interference and adjudicating disputes between licensees.

But the National Space Council asked me to join to explain why the Federal Communications Commission, the agency I lead that was created by the Communications Act of 1934, is so focused on space today.

So I told a story. Shortly after I took the reins at the FCC, Newton Minow reached out. He was the storied head of the agency during the Kennedy Administration. He was 96 and sharp as a tack. In popular culture, he made a name for himself calling television a "vast wasteland," but our back-and-forth was focused strictly on space. He wanted me to know that we were about to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the launch of the very first communications satellite into orbit. The launch of that satellite—known as Telstar 1—was historic, and the FCC helped make it happen. The satellite facilitated the broadcast of television between the United States and Europe. For the first time, it was possible to share images in real time at scale. This led Chairman Minow to famously tell President Kennedy that "communications satellites will be much more important than sending man into space. Ideas last longer than men."

I believe it. And I think time has proved him right. Some months after I shared this story at the Science Center, Newton Minow passed away. But what stays with me was the graceful way he reached out early in my tenure and how what he drew my attention to was undeniably true. The early work the FCC did to assist with the launch of Telstar 1 was a sign of what was to come. It was the first commercial payload in space.

That kind of collaboration between the federal government and private enterprises in space was new back then. Today, it is absolutely vital. There are studies that show United States' investment in space activities now exceeds all other global governments combined. We have ten times more space-focused companies than any other country.

What started six decades ago with Telstar 1 is now the fastest growing part of communications technology. I know because at the FCC I have a front row seat. Every day I see how innovation is changing the ways we connect and how those connections fuel everything in modern civic and commercial life.

Today, satellite communications support broadcasting, broadband, and so much more. This is technology responsible for some of the most vital connections on Earth. Plus, launches are no longer rare, constellations are no longer small, and satellites are no longer just big, bulky objects destined for decades in our skies.

Consider the numbers. Right now, we have applications for more than 56,000 satellites pending before the FCC. That is twice the number of applications we had just four years ago. On top of that, we are seeing new applications for novel space activities like lunar landers, space tugs that can deploy other satellites, and space antenna farms that can relay communications.

All this activity led me to make changes at the FCC. A year ago, I gave a speech to the Satellite Industry of America. In my remarks, I shared that I planned to set up the first-ever Space Bureau at the FCC. There are now so many new technologies in the space industry, so many applications pending before the agency, and so many more innovations on the horizon that I said the agency can't keep doing things the old way and expect to thrive in the new.

Today, the Space Bureau is up and running. It is designed to support United States leadership in the space economy, promote long-term technical capacity to address satellite policies, and improve our coordination with other agencies on all of these issues.

Of course, an organization is only as strong as its leadership. With that in mind, I am pleased to report that the Space Bureau is being led by Julie Kearney. Perhaps most important for this audience, she is on the agenda for 2:30 this afternoon. I encourage all of you to attend her session. You will not be disappointed.

Julie and the Space Bureau have hit the ground running. Looking at the agenda today—with panels on in-space servicing, satellite-to-cell communications, satellite constellations, and orbital debris, I think you are going to like what we have been up to.

Here are a few quick highlights.

First, to keep pace with the increase in both the complexity and number of applications for space services before the agency, the FCC just adopted new rules to streamline our satellite policies. This streamlining effort is designed to expedite the processing of space and earth station applications and provide clear timeframes for action. This, in turn, will help promote competition and innovation by making it easier for new companies to enter the market.

As part of these streamlining reforms, we have also kicked off a new Transparency Initiative with frequently asked questions, how-to-videos, workshops and more—aimed at providing those building satellite systems with the tools and knowledge they need to get their applications filed. With the number of companies in the space sector expanding, we want to make sure they all have the information they require up front and early in the process.

Second, we have identified airwaves in the 2 GHz band that all operators can access so they have the spectrum resources they need for successful commercial space launches. That means more bandwidth for vital links to launch vehicles. This makes it simpler for new competitors to get reliable access to the spectrum they need. Launches are nail-biting undertakings under ideal conditions, so this will help make it a bit easier.

Third, we are working on in-space servicing, assembly, and manufacturing—or ISAM—capabilities. During the past year, the agency has been actively exploring ways ISAM can help us repair and refuel satellites in space, assemble whole systems in orbit, or even build entire new industries that advance our scientific frontiers and national security. Our effort is focused on the communications necessary to enable these awe-inspiring capabilities. Stay tuned because we will follow up on what we have learned and develop policies to support these innovative activities.

Fourth, we are committed to mitigating orbital debris so that the space economy can support our grandest ambitions. Last year, we put in place rules that reduce by 80 percent the amount of time operators regulated by the FCC have to deorbit retired satellites. To understand what this means in practice, it used to be that operators of low-earth orbiting satellites could just leave them in our skies for 25 years after their useful life. We have cut that time down to five years. This is big because it helps reduce the risk of collisions that can cause space communications failures. But there's more. Just two weeks ago, the FCC announced our first-ever enforcement action against a company for its failure to comply with a satellite de-orbiting plan.

Fifth and finally, I want to tell you about an effort that I think is really a game-changer—developing satellite-to-cellphone communications.

To understand why, let me share a story from the deadly wildfires in Hawai'i that recently leveled the historic town of Lahaina. When the fires were raging, five young people aged 18 to 30 found themselves trapped in white van near the outlet mall in Lahaina. The skies were smoky. It was not clear where to go or what to do, so they decided to drive toward the ocean. But the roads to the water were blocked, and poor visibility quickly deteriorated into no visibility. They were stuck in a sea of flames with nowhere to go. Terrestrial wireless services were knocked out so there was no way to call 911 for help. The van was hot and getting hotter. The situation seemed helpless.

But this crew of five young people survived. They are alive today thanks to new technology. Their phone had a new feature—the ability to connect directly to emergency personnel by bypassing ground-based communications and instead using satellite signals delivered from space. At 6:14 PM their message asking for help reached first responders along

with their location. By 6:47 PM they sent a follow-up message to the dispatchers to say they had been rescued.

That's incredible. And that is why the FCC is developing a new regulatory framework to support broader direct satellite-to-smartphone communications. It is part of what we call the Single Network Future. Our approach is designed to make it easier for satellite operators to collaborate with wireless carriers to access their terrestrial spectrum and fill in gaps in coverage from space to the phone in your pocket. Beyond that, our goal is to bring together terrestrial wireless and satellite capabilities to accomplish what neither network can do on its own. If we do this right, we will end mobile dead zones. We will have connectivity everywhere. So stay tuned.

That is a tour through some of our newest initiatives coming out of the Space Bureau. But I want to close with a quick story.

I am not sure how many of you may have seen this, but last week there were images kicking around social media of President Kennedy and the seven Mercury astronauts. They were from an event on October 10, 1963—six decades ago. The President had invited John Glenn and company to the White House to present them with the Nation's biggest prize for achievement in aeronautics.

The pictures are a true period piece. The colors are supersaturated. The men—and they were all men—have narrow ties and flat-top haircuts. This is a whole other vibe from the Artemis II crew that I had the pleasure of meeting earlier this year.

An event like this in the Rose Garden is destined for the history books. It is easy to understand this now. But at the time, many questioned the wisdom of the space program. President Kennedy addressed this head on in his remarks and defended his vision for a new frontier of space exploration. He said: "When the first . . . satellite went up, I am sure it was regarded as an extraordinary feat, but not perhaps of great international significance. I can assure you that it has been a most extraordinary influence on our lives, been useful beyond measure to the United States." The President then added, "Some . . . may not feel that this is the greatest priority to our country"—and by that he meant the effort to send men into space. But, he went on, "I am confident that when the job is done . . . it will become obvious to us, its significance as obvious to us, its uses as obvious to us, its benefit as obvious to us as . . . the satellite."

Think about it. To convey the importance of some of American history's greatest heroes and one of our greatest achievements, one of America's greatest orators said their contributions to humanity could one day match that of . . . satellites. I like to think somewhere President Kennedy's FCC Chairman Newton Minow was smiling.

I want to thank all of you for what you do to move our economy and our country forward. And I want you to know that the FCC looks forward to working with you to make it happen.

Thank you.